

WHAT IS “DECISION COUNSELING” (DC)?

Decision Counseling (DC), **is not couples therapy**, and does not assume a mutual and equal commitment to the relationship. There is no attempt to “fix” or “repair” the relationship, and DC assumes that there is no shared or equal commitment by both partners, to repair the relationship as it is.

DC is a time-limited process (5-8 weeks max, 1.5-2 hours/week) designed to help you **get clear and feel confident about your decision** to either:

- 1) Do nothing and stay in the marriage as it is,
- 2) Separate &/or Divorce, or
- 3) Commit whole-heartedly to intensive couples therapy for 6 months, without separation or divorce as options.

Each partner also gains clarity about his/her contribution to the challenges that exist, and what each partner would need to change and accept, if the relationship were to continue. DC will benefit the partners, whether they remain in the relationship or decide to separate/divorce (see Benefits below).

WHEN DO YOU PURSUE DECISION COUNSELING?

“He wants to save the relationship, but I’ve had it.”

or

“She says it’s too late, but I want to save the relationship.”

or

“We both have really mixed feelings about staying or divorcing.”

Most couples have doubts about their relationships at some point. Unfortunately, most launch into couples therapy first, *without* assessing the extent to which each partner is certain s/he even wants to invest in the relationship! Couples therapy can’t be effective, for example, if one partner starts therapy with one foot out the door, and the couple isn’t fully committed to the relationship from the outset. That commitment needs to be established *before* couples therapy can begin to be effective.

BENEFITS

Would you be willing to invest a few hours in Decision Counseling if you knew DC could . . .

- Relieve the relationship from an underlying pressure or an unspoken drive for a hasty, premature resolution by one or both partners
- Generate greater clarity and confidence about whatever you decide
- Help you understand what it would take, exactly, for both of you to be willing to sustain the relationship
- Enhance your readiness for a more focused, committed, and therefore more effective, couples therapy process, if *that* is your decision
- Enhance the authenticity of couples work, especially when previously one partner was not fully invested in repairing or deepening understanding within the relationship
- Help prevent one partner from entering couples therapy, while still escaping frequently into “Separation/Divorce Fantasies,” that obstruct full investment in strengthening the couple’s bond

- Identify personal challenges that you would want to work on to be more effective in *any* relationship
- Help prepare you for a more peaceful, respectful separation/divorce, if *that* is your decision
- Increase your sense of personal responsibility and power about whatever you decide, while decreasing blaming yourself or your partner in ways that damage your future relationship with your partner/co-parent, and risk harming your children
- Provide comfort, clarity and closure for a partner not wanting the divorce/break-up, so you can both move forward more respectfully (if you are a co-parent, this may also mean less distress for your children)

WHAT TO EXPECT

- At **each meeting** you will meet together, then individually. Following each individual meeting, you will read a statement, co-created with your therapist, to your partner regarding what you've learned about your partner/yourself, as well as whether you are willing to meet for another session, for example.
- At the end of DC, if you each decide to make an ***all-out effort to pursue intensive couples therapy*** for an additional 6 months, you both agree to *take separation and divorce completely off the table throughout that time*. If separation or divorce resurfaces as an option for either of you, DC may resume.
- A critical part of the work of DC may be to distinguish, *for example*, between: a) a clear, sound decision to Divorce, b) the impulse to divorce without clarity, simply to get relief from prolonged emotional pain, and c) frequent escape into thoughts about Separation/Divorce as “relief fantasies,” that may undermine your ability to invest in the relationship, even when you wish to invest.
- Your DC therapist will be decidedly ***more directive and focused*** than a couples counseling therapist often is. S/he will be more of a coach, than a therapist, although her/his therapeutic skills are needed for effectiveness. As counterproductive styles of relating occur, expect your therapist to stop and redirect your behavior gently, or to train up new skills in order to move forward effectively.
- Expect your therapist to train you in some ***basic listening, communication and anxiety-management skills*** that will help you move through the current phase of your relationship more effectively (e.g. emotion regulation and distress tolerance skills allow for the effective forebrain functioning needed for clear decision-making, validation, assertion, mindfulness & effectively beginning difficult but necessary conversations).
- **Skills training** is not aimed at repairing your relationship — nor does skills training assume the relationship will remain intact. These are the same skills taught during co-mediation, collaborative divorce or co-parenting work, as well as during couples therapy. At the very least, if you decide to divorce, these skills will help you co-parent or discuss future concerns more effectively. Depending on the degree to which such skills are needed to move forward effectively, DC may require additional sessions.
- PCD's mental health professionals are all trained to provide intensive couples therapy, if the couple decides to pursue this. Your Decision Counseling

therapist cannot later serve as a Divorce Coach for one of the partners in a Collaborative Divorce.

- If the couple decides clearly to **separate and/or divorce**, more sessions may be scheduled to discuss the specific conditions under which separation will occur, and/or which **divorce options** may be most suitable for your family's needs and resources.
- **Co-parenting** concerns may also be addressed following DC, including: getting along with your co-parent and those in your co-parent's household, effective conflict resolution skills, effective management of custody issues, practicing the parenting plan that's been agreed to, application of effective communication and win-win negotiation skills and writing or modifying the parenting plan.
- Similarly, following the decision to **separate or divorce**, the therapist may, if you choose, help you to **therapeutically address**: your concerns about your children related to separation or divorce or custody situations, referrals for the children's psycho-social challenges, clearing out old issues between you in order to move forward into a healthier separation, rebuilding relationships between co-parents to avoid parents' alienating the children from the other parent, facilitating the restructuring of your family and your family's new identity, etc.
- Once the therapist has served as a Decision Counselor, s/he may serve as a Couples Therapist, or a Co-parenting specialist, and may make referrals to appropriate divorce professionals. However, the therapist serving as a Decision Counselor or Couples Therapist may not also serve as a Divorce Coach, Co-mediator or Child Specialist. The Decision Counselor's role clearly will NOT be that of a Child Custody Evaluator.